

# HOOFING IT FOR OVER 10 YRS



**JOHN PATRICK VEAGUE**

## **AGENCY**

Tourism Arts & Heritage Cabinet

## **OFFICE**

Kentucky Horse Park

## **HOMETOWN**

Chicago, Ill

## **RESIDENCE**

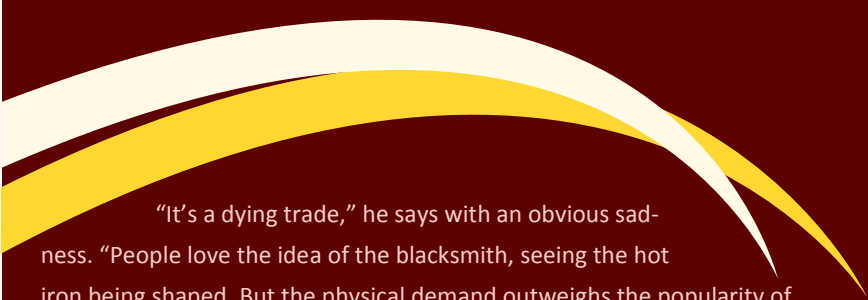
Sonora, KY

## Protecting the integrity of Kentucky's renowned

John Veague jokes, "I give equipeddies," to the hundreds of visitors who watch him perform his duties as the resident farrier at the Kentucky Horse Park. More seriously, he says, "I guarantee I have one of the most strenuous jobs in state government." A farrier is a specialist in equine hoof care, who combines blacksmith and veterinarian skills to care for horses' feet. Not only does it require physical stamina – an average 2,200 pound horse can exert as much as 300-400 pounds of pressure in one leg – but the precision of the cuts must also be perfect.

Veague explains that the horse's foot must be completely flat and flawless, to support the leg joints and not cause injury. "Most horses will die from complications of the foot." That can be a lot of responsibility when you're working on million dollar Derby hopefuls. Add to that the heat of a hot summer, and the expectancy to be upbeat and entertaining to the curious guests who tour the park, and it becomes demanding.

"Life has its own little plan for you, and I'm blessed to be here. It's a great place to work."



"It's a dying trade," he says with an obvious sadness. "People love the idea of the blacksmith, seeing the hot iron being shaped. But the physical demand outweighs the popularity of the job. Today, people don't have longevity in the business." Veague says about three years is the average duration for a farrier. He is the only one out of his graduating class of 80 still working the business. He's now in his tenth year as a farrier; six years with the Kentucky Horse Park.

Living an amazingly diverse life, Veague grew up on a farm, where horses were a hobby. His family farmed and grew produce, and he would set up a roadside stand to make extra money. He would also stay close to the horsemen who leased part of his family's land. His goal was to become a "complete horseman," and learn all aspects.

Veague played college basketball for the UIC Flames at the University of Illinois, and professional rugby for the Chicago Griffins. He earned his degree in health science.

He began adulthood in the Chicago Mercantile Exchange as a runner. "I was the one who would run the bids down to the floor." It was an exciting time, but a young lady soon encouraged him to move to Kentucky. The two of them now live on 65 acres in Sonora, Kentucky with their eight-year-old son Jacob Daniel and 14 horses.

And that's not all. Veague sits on the Larue County Planning and Zoning Board, and is the Athletics Director for the Elizabethtown Christian Academy where he used to be the high school basketball coach, a role he currently plays at the Elizabethtown Community and Technical College. He also serves as an ambassador for the American Farrier's Association, which supports education of and promotes excellence in the industry. His biological family is in Ireland, where he travels to visit and does farrier work in Dublin. How does he do it all? He laughs, "The cobbler's kids are barefoot."

Veague says each farrier has their own interpretation of the skill, but he tries to stay true to textbook standards. "There are dozens of ways to get the same result. Our goal is to keep the horses sound. I think I can listen and learn from everyone. We're all sponges."

He likens the work to that of surgery, because of the detail, and to running a marathon, because of the Kentucky heat. He's been honored to work on names like Cougar, Alysheba, and Western Dreamer. "I never dreamed I'd be in Kentucky." But when he arrives early in the morning, with the horses grazing and the fog hovering over the rolling hills, he realizes, "Life has its own little plan for you, and I'm blessed to be here. It's a great place to work."